

Johnstown City Hall
Northeast corner of Main and Market Streets
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5387

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHNSTOWN CITY HALL

HABS No. PA-5387

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Location: Northeast corner of Main and Market streets,
Johnstown, Cambria County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: City of Johnstown.

Present Use: City Hall.

Significance: The present city hall was built during a period of great optimism in Johnstown. The previous building on the site, erected in 1872, had been used as a market house, police station, and municipal building. It was destroyed in the 1889 flood; when faced with the task of building a new city hall, the city fathers wanted to be sure that the new one symbolized what they believed was the modern, progressive nature of Johnstown. To that end, Charles Robinson of Altoona designed a Richardsonian Romanesque structure, which at the time was the style of choice in America for monumental civic buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1900-1902. The cornerstone was laid on October 5, 1900, and the building was occupied on October 30, 1902.
2. Architect: Charles M. Robinson of Altoona, Pennsylvania, with Walter Myton as project architect.

Myton (1872-1929), an important local architect, was born and raised in Huntingdon, Pa., and received his architectural training at Cornell University. When he graduated in June 1895 he moved back to Huntingdon, where he practiced for two years. He then practiced in Pittsburgh for two years, coming to Johnstown in October 1900 to take charge of Robinson's branch office. He opened his own Johnstown office in October 1901. In 1902 he went into partnership with former mayor James K. Boyd, a liaison that lasted until 1906. Myton then practiced alone until his death.

Myton designed at least forty residences in the area, along with as many churches, schools, and stores. He appears to have practiced no single architectural "style," instead shifting design elements and motifs to reflect popular style or his clients' tastes. (Myton biography compiled by Susan Policicchio, available at Johnstown Flood Museum.)

3. Original and subsequent owners: The city of Johnstown has been the sole owner and occupant of the building.
4. Alterations and additions: The exterior of the building stands as it was built, while the interior has undergone modernization: woodwork has been painted, new room partitions have been added.

B. Historical Context

When Joseph Johns laid out the Town of Conemaugh (later to be named Johnstown) in 1800, he decreed that the four equal sections of Market Square (the corner of Main and Market Streets) were guaranteed to "the future inhabitants of the said Town of Conemaugh a free and undisturbed use from henceforth forever." Market Square remained "free and undisturbed" until 1872, when the first municipal building was erected on the northeast corner of the intersection.

This action seemingly conflicts with Johns' original plan, but it does make sense in context of events in Johnstown at the time. Johns also guaranteed that lot Nos. 49, 50, 51, and 52 (now Central Park; currently bounded by Main Street, Park Place, Locust Street, and Franklin Street) on his plan were to be used for a county courthouse and other public buildings. Unfortunately, Johns was too optimistic about Johnstown -- it did not become the county seat, so there was no need for a courthouse. The square was used for public buildings and markets, but in 1872 all structures were cleared and the city hired a landscape architect to design plantings and walkways for the site. Thus, a municipal building had to go somewhere, and as it also housed the market, Market Square was a logical choice.

After the flood, it was time for a new, bigger and better city hall -- one that would reflect the image of Johnstown as a nationally prominent city. While it was built on the same corner of Market Square as the previous municipal building, the new city hall no longer encompassed a market house. It was built to house offices of city officials (mayor, police chief, and chief of the fire department); city council chambers; committee rooms; and prisoner cells.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: With its asymmetrical facade, towers, and rustication, City Hall is a very good example of Richardsonian Romanesque.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. The building has been very well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Basically rectangular, with an attached tower, the two-story building with a full basement is 54' x 114'. The west (Market Street) and south (Main Street) facades are the public facades.
2. Foundation: Reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: The broken-range ashlar work is of buff-colored stone from local quarries.
4. Structural systems, framing: Steel-framed.
5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The two main entrances are in the central bays on each of the Market and Main street facades. The doors were oak, and the October 24, 1902, Johnstown Tribune noted that "the glass on the doors is of the Colonial style, which is smooth on one side and wavy on the other." Each doorway is framed by an arch with voussoirs and keystone.

Originally there were small, decorative balconies above the two entrances.

- b. Windows and shutters: On the Market Street facade the windows on the second story are paired; all are arched one-over-one-light sash, with a transom dividing the curve of the arch from the rectangle below. The central pair, over the entrance, are set in a voussoired arch. Also paired, the first-story windows are one-over-one-light-sash, with a small transom light above.

On the Main Street facade the paired first-floor windows are identical to the first-floor Market Street windows; the second-floor windows in the end bays are identical to the second-floor windows in the central bay of the Market Street facade. The four second-story windows in the central bay of this facade are set in a rusticated arcade; the bases and columns are smooth, with basket-weave capitals.

There are two arched dormer windows on the Market Street facade and one on the Main Street facade.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The hipped roof with a cross gable and three dormers is covered with red terra cotta tile.
- b. Dormers: Three steeply pitched gable dormers, with stone

faces and arched windows.

- c. Cupola: A square wooden cupola, rising out of the western end of the roof, contains miniature features found in the larger building, such as false arches with voussoirs and small arched balconies. It also has clock faces on all four sides.
- d. Tower: The tower on the easternmost end of the Market Street facade is canted, also with a red tile roof.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: Two wide corridors -- one leading from each entrance -- intersect in the middle of the first floor. When the building was first occupied, the floors were occupied as follows:

First floor: Offices of the city clerk, city treasurer, city controller, mayor, chief of police, fire marshal and jail cells.
Second floor: city council chambers, committee rooms, offices for city engineer, city solicitor, street commissioners, health officer, marketmaster.

Except for the Johnstown Police Department, which has moved, the first-floor plan remains basically intact, although the second-floor plan has undergone small modifications.

- 2. Stairway: The stairway is located at the intersection of the two main corridors, opposite the Market Street entrance. It is made of elaborately ornamented wrought iron, with marble runners.
- 3. Flooring: Mosaic terrazzo.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
- 5. Openings: The wooden doors are set into a wooden arch; the top half of each door is the same "Colonial glass" as is found in the exterior doors.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: The woodwork was natural-finish, quartered white oak.
- 7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: steam.
 - b. Lighting: gas and electricity, originally.

D. Site:

City Hall is on the northeast corner of Main and Market streets, on one of the sections of Market Square.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: Some are in the collection of the Johnstown Flood Museum. There are also some in the Johnstown Tribune, October 24, 1902, and October 5, 1900.

B. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Tax-assessment records, Johnstown City Hall.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Johnstown Tribune, October 24, 1902, October 5, 1900.

Lebovich, William L. America's City Halls. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984.

Policicchio, Benjamin. "The Architecture of Johnstown,"
Johnstown: The Story of a Unique Valley. Johnstown:
Johnstown Flood Museum, 1985.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) provides context for the neighborhoods. See additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Terri Hartman in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Hartman's and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.